

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM SCOTTISH BUILDING FEDERATION

On behalf of the Scottish Building Federation (SBF), I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Parliament Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee's call for views concerning the proposed Climate Change (Scotland) Bill.

Background

Scotland's construction industry is crucial to the health of the Scottish economy both as a driver of economic growth and a provider of well paid skilled jobs. Recent statistics show that construction contributes over £13 billion to the Scottish economy, more than tourism and whisky combined

A recent SBF survey of the sector revealed that, as a result of the current economic downturn, around 20,000 Scottish construction jobs were lost in 2008, representing a significant loss in capacity and skills from the industry. SBF's expectation is that 2009 will be a similarly challenging year for the construction sector.

Our Response

The Scottish construction industry is fully aware that it has a major part to play in ensuring that the built environment makes a significant contribution in combating the effects of climate change. Overall, building use is responsible for around 50% of total CO2 emissions in the UK, with around 30% coming from homes, and 20% from commercial buildings. We also recognize that measures to reduce construction waste and increase recycling require to be maintained and increased.

With respect to the construction of new buildings, SBF were part of the expert panel that considered the issue of building standards and produced the Report "A Low Carbon Building Standards Strategy For Scotland" (Published December 2007), which recommended measures to improve energy performance of houses and buildings, with a view to reducing carbon dioxide and other emissions. The work streams identified within this report require to be progressed in close consultation with the construction industry to ensure the outcomes are realistic and ultimately positive in terms of climate change. We repeat our offer of assistance and a willingness to be involved in this process.

In considering the current economic environment, and the importance to the wider Scottish economy of retaining an active and dynamic construction industry, SBF strongly believes that the Climate Change (Scotland) Bill offers important opportunities to improve significantly the energy performance of our existing building stock. Our view is that a detailed policy focused on achieving this goal could also assist in retaining industry capacity, as well as equipping workers in the building sector with valuable green construction skills.

An important prerequisite for achieving these goals will be to ensure that all buildings are properly assessed in order to determine their existing energy performance, thereby ensuring that any future retrofit programme is targeted in the most cost-effective way possible.

SBF believe that in order to meet the targets set by the Scottish Government an assessment of energy performance will be required for all types of building to ensure that priorities can be set, which recognize the funding constraints, whether these be in the public or private sector. Failure to carry out a comprehensive assessment of energy performance and establish a priority plan may result in the headline objectives of the Bill being difficult, if not impossible, to meet.

Other Matters That Require Consideration:

- Realistic and achievable stepped targets to ensure progressive improvements to achieve the ultimate objectives.
- Consideration of other factors, i.e. the economic climate.
- Sufficient advance warning of changes in regulations.
- Clear and easily accessed grant funding, potentially for both householders and the construction sector.

In summary, we would therefore urge Members of the Scottish Parliament to consider how the Bill might be reformulated in a way that recognises the vital contribution improvements to the existing built environment can make towards meeting the dual objectives of ensuring a significant reduction in CO2 from Scottish buildings and helping the Scottish construction industry to retain capacity and further enhance skills.